

Goal 2: North Carolinians will follow good health practices.

Health behaviors are estimated to account for 50 percent of health status.³⁹ If our citizens are to be healthy and if we're to lower the cost of health care, increase our productive capacity, and enjoy life to its fullest, we should first look at how we live. In North Carolina, we see a high prevalence of lifestyle-related disease, such as heart disease, stroke, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease, and diabetes. Two-thirds of North Carolina's preventable deaths and a \$6 billion annual drain on the economy can be attributed to just three of those factors -- tobacco, poor nutrition, and lack of physical activity along, according to North Carolina Prevention Partners. Other leading causes of preventable deaths include alcohol and drugs, AIDS, guns, and car accidents.⁴⁰

As disturbing as the overall situation is, minorities are disproportionately likely to have lifestyle factors putting them at risk of poor health⁴¹ and in fact die prematurely at much higher rates than do whites.⁴² People who live in rural areas also are more likely to die of injuries and/or to suffer from heart disease, cancer, and diabetes. A study from East Carolina University bears this out. It looked at causes of premature death (before age 75) in eastern North Carolina which is largely rural and has a high percentage African-American population. It found that more eastern North Carolinians died prematurely from cancer, heart disease, diabetes, stroke, and unintentional injury than the rest of the state by percentages ranging from 14 to 40.⁴³

Cardiovascular disease and stroke bear particular attention. Heart disease is the leading cause of death in North Carolina and in 1996 alone accounted for a fifth of all hospitalizations and \$2 billion in hospital charges.⁴⁴ Yet it is largely preventable through exercise, good nutrition, and abstinence from smoking. Stroke is the state's third leading cause of death, accounting for 8 percent of deaths and rising. Overall, the state exceeds the national rate in stroke deaths, and Eastern North Carolina's rate of death by stroke doubles that of the nation. This pattern has existed for at least 50 years.⁴⁵

North Carolinians interested in improving lifestyles and health are beginning to make themselves heard. The Healthy Carolinians Task Force, Prevention Partners, the Heart Disease and Stroke Prevention Task Force, and the Smart Growth movement all focus much-needed attention on this area. The following measures draw heavily from the work of the Healthy Carolinians Task Force and its *Healthy Carolinians 2010 Report*.

"Measuring health by years of life lost before age 75, if eastern North Carolina were a state, it would rank 51st." -- Christopher Mansfield, Director, Center for Health Services Research and Development, East Carolina University School of Medicine⁴⁶

North Carolina continues to have a high rate of infant mortality, third highest in the nation, despite numerous improvements in prenatal care. The next major step in lowering this tragic number is to address health issues before conception, in keeping with the emphasis on healthy lifestyles. As this effort continues, we should keep a vigilant eye on the impact on infant mortality.

Infant mortality	1997-99	2000
(Rates per 1,000 live births)	Infant death (less than 1 year)	Infant death (less than 1 year)
North Carolina total	9.1	6.2
White*	6.7	4.9
Black*	15.7	11.1
American Indian*	13.4	5.8
Asian or Pacific Islander*	5.9	4.3
Hispanic	6.4	3.2
* not Hispanic	Source: N.C. State Center for Health Statistics	